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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the findings and conclusions of a major study of the status of blacks in American society since the eve of World War II. The study concludes that the current state of black-white relations is the result of the negative attitudes that whites hold towards blacks and the disadvantaged conditions under which many blacks live. The following summary findings are reported: (1) the well-being of both blacks and whites has advanced greatly over the past 50 years by all aggregate statistical measures; (2) blacks remain substantially behind whites by almost all the same indicators; (3) the economic status of blacks relative to whites has deteriorated since the early 1970s; (4) the political, educational, health, and cultural status of blacks showed important gains from the 1940s through the 1960s and some important indicators continued to improve after the early 1970s; (5) some groups of blacks have increased their socioeconomic status but a substantial minority remain disadvantaged; (6) political and social activism by both blacks and whites led to changes in government policies that made sweeping changes in the legal status of blacks; (7) resistance to social change in race relations in American society continues; and (8) broad changes in overall economic conditions have significantly affected social and economic opportunities for all Americans. Policy recommendations are suggested in the following areas: (1) provision of education, health care, and other services; (2) facilitation of economic growth and full employment; (3) reduction of discrimination and involuntary segregation; and (4) development and reform of welfare programs to avoid long-term poverty. Statistical data are included on 20 graphs. (FMW)

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A COMMON DESTINY

BLACKS AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

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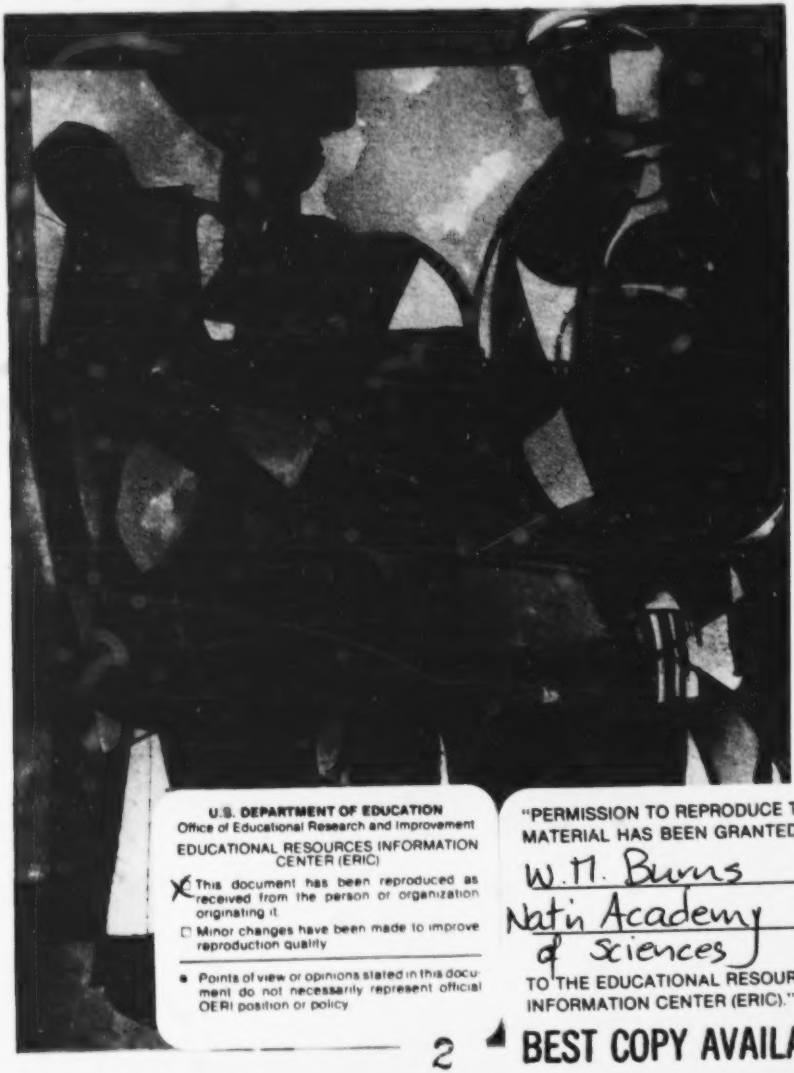

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Summary and Conclusions

A COMMON DESTINY

BLACKS AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

Gerald David Jaynes and
Robin M. Williams, Jr.
Editors

Committee on the Status of Black Americans

Commission on Behavioral and
Social Sciences and Education

National Research Council

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This report has been reviewed by a group other than the authors according to procedures approved by a Report Review Committee consisting of members of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine.

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COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF BLACK AMERICANS

ROBIN M. WILLIAMS, JR. (*Chair*), Department of Sociology, Cornell University
HUBERT M. BLALOCK, JR., Department of Sociology, University of Washington
LEE P. BROWN, Police Department, Houston, Texas
JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, Department of History, Duke University
JAMES L. GIBBS, JR., Department of Anthropology, Stanford University
BERNARD R. GIFFORD, Apple Computer, Inc.
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*Did not participate in committee activities after June 1987.

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ROBERT M. HAUSER (*Chair*), Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin
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ELSIE L. SCOTT, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, Landover, Maryland
RAYMOND E. WOLFINGER, Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley

PANEL ON SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN (*Chair*), Department of History, Duke University
JAMES LOWELL GIBBS, JR., Department of Anthropology, Stanford University
THOMAS F. PETTIGREW, Psychology Board of Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz
NANCY J. WEISS, Department of History, Princeton University
ROBIN M. WILLIAMS, JR., Department of Sociology, Cornell University

*Did not participate in panel activities after July 1986.

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PREFACE

This report documents the unfinished agenda of a nation still struggling to come to terms with the consequences of its history of relations between black and white Americans. In many ways this history has left a legacy of pain, and the report would be remiss if it did not acknowledge and emphasize that fact. In the pages that follow, we describe many improvements in the economic, political, and social position of black Americans. We also describe the continuance of conditions of poverty, segregation, discrimination, and social fragmentation of the most serious proportions.

The study was initiated early in 1985 after more than 3 years of preliminary investigation, planning, and organization. That preliminary work included consideration of the status of other racial and ethnic minorities in America. After much discussion, it was decided to restrict the study to black Americans. The decision arose from limited resources and time and from recognition of the great variations in the experience of different racial and ethnic groups in the United States. And the case of black Americans is unique—in its history of slavery and of extreme segregation, exclusion, and discrimination.

We recognize the potential value of comparative studies and hope that they will be carried out in the future. Each minority has its unique history, and the reasons for variations in current status vary widely. At this time, however, a crucial factor is the availability of data: information on blacks is far more extensive and of better quality than that for other major racial and ethnic minorities. Most important, however, the historical significance of blacks to the nation and the importance of black-white relations in U.S. society today are surely more than adequate grounds for the focus of this study.

The original charge to the Committee on the Status of Black Americans from the National Research Council and its Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (CBASSE) reads as follows:

> . . . marshall descriptive data on the changing position of blacks in American society since 1940, draw from the wealth of existing research to describe the cultural context, including an increasingly complex framework of laws, policies, and institutions within which the observed changes have occurred; and explore the consequences, anticipated and unanticipated, of public and private initiatives to ameliorate the position of blacks in America.

The historical dimension of this task has reinforced our awareness of the distinctive history of black Americans. Due in part to that special history, blacks are the most studied racial or ethnic population group in the nation. This report will undoubtedly be compared to earlier studies of American race relations, especially to two reports that, like it, were collaborative efforts: *An American Dilemma* (1944) and the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (1968). [An earlier, rarely noted effort of this type was Charles S. Johnson, editor, *The Negro in American Civilization* (1930), which has not been given its just due as a treatise on black-white relations in the United States.] Readers of this report might profit from a brief reminder of the legacy of those well-known studies.

In the midst of World War II, Gunnar Myrdal's monumental survey of race relations, *An American Dilemma*, predicted slow improvement in the educational, political, and social status of blacks; a worsening economic situation; rising self-confidence and assertiveness among blacks; and an impending breakdown among whites of formerly accepted beliefs and attitudes of white race dominance.

An American Dilemma correctly anticipated increasing black solidarity and activism, increasing dissension over racial practices among whites, heightened conflict, and a national movement toward "equalitarian reforms." It correctly saw that the impending domestic changes would be strongly affected by World War II and by the international status of the nation that claimed to represent democracy in a race-conscious world. The accuracy of many of these forecasts is documented in the present report.

What Myrdal did not correctly forecast was the strong resistance to full equality for blacks that would remain after the old system of legalized segregation had been eliminated. In hindsight, *An American Dilemma* appears overly confident that change "in the hearts and minds" of men and women would eliminate racial separation and discrimination.

A quarter century later, the urban uprisings of blacks during the 1960s prompted another major inquiry—this time through the appointment of a presidential commission. The *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, "the Kerner report" (1968), is a forthright and vivid report whose basic conclusion stressed a condition, also emphasized in *An American Dilemma*, of a nation continuing to move toward "two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal" (p. 1). The Kerner report emphasized how the legacy of past discrimination in the forms of segregation and poverty had created a black ghetto whose environment was destructive to many of its inhabitants—a ghetto "largely maintained by white institutions and condoned by white society" (pp. 1–2). After this diagnosis, the report called

for prompt national action and presented a set of recommendations aimed at reducing segregation and discrimination, safeguarding civil and political rights, and increasing educational and economic opportunities.

Two decades after that landmark report, we now find that—despite important changes—there are striking resemblances between the description of 1968 and the position of black Americans reflected in our findings. To the extent that such continuity of black status exists, it derives from persisting basic conditions not yet removed by either private initiatives or the national actions that have been taken, much less by those repeatedly proposed but never fully undertaken.

Contemporary views of the status of black-white relations in America vary widely. Perspectives range from optimism that the main problems have been solved, to the view that black progress is largely an illusion, to assessments that the nation is retrogressing and moving toward increased racial disparities. To some observers, the present situation is only another episode in a long history of recurring cycles of apparent improvement that are followed by new forms of dominance in changed contexts: the level of black status changes, it is said, but the one constant is blacks' continuing subordinate social position. To other observers, the opposite conception is correct: long-run progress is the dominant trend. Listening to these discordant views, reasonable men and women may well wonder what, indeed, is the case. To this serious question the present report has sought to bring to bear a large compilation of facts and analyses. It would be unrealistic to expect all readers to agree with all the emphases and nuances of the report. We hope, however, that it is clear that we have tried to search out and critically assess objective evidence wherever available. Our interpretations are those that have survived a lengthy and intensive process of criticism and refinement.

To the extent possible, existing data and published and unpublished research were used, but we also developed new data and analyses. A great many studies over the years since World War II have dealt with specific aspects of the position of black people in the United States. But there remained a need for a synthesis of existing research that could serve as a point of departure for future analyses and for the informed development of policies by business, voluntary associations, and local, state, and federal governments. The availability of an unprecedented resource of data and research findings from diverse sources makes such a synthesis possible; controversies over the facts of the case, as well as over past and current policies, make the study especially timely.

This report concentrates on description and analysis of the position of black Americans—now some 30 million people—in our complex society. During the nearly 50 years covered in our survey, significant changes occurred in almost every aspect of the national society, from family life to international relations, from manufacturing technologies to styles of life, from employment patterns to civil rights. All Americans were affected, but as the body of the report makes clear, in many ways black people were uniquely involved.

The large inventory of data and research analyses used by the committee and its panels and consultants made it feasible to complete a difficult assignment. At the same time, we found that many important questions simply could not be answered because crucial data were missing. Some of these serious gaps in the nation's resources of information are noted in Appendix A. Considerable uncertainty must attend any attempt to develop effective social policies unless vital statistical series are maintained and more adequate support provided for research on the economic and social changes that are now transforming the lives of the American people.

While the study proceeded, the dynamic nature of black-white relations was being repeatedly demonstrated through changes occurring in American society. Thus, U.S. Representative William Gray became chair of the House Budget Committee in 1985, and, 4 years later, chair of the House Democratic Caucus, a major leadership position; also in 1989, Ronald Brown became national chair of the Democratic Party, Bill White became president of professional baseball's National League, and Barbara C. Harris became the first female bishop in the Episcopal Church. Other significant events also occurred, and as participants suggested that we were compelled to comment on this or another event, it became clear that the report could not be completed and keep apace of American society. Consequently, we chose 1985–1986 as a rough terminal point for the report's analyses. In some instances data or easily interpreted events that occurred after 1986 are reported, but they are relatively infrequent.

The committee's 22 members were selected from most of the major disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences. The committee was subdivided into five working panels, dealing, respectively, with economic status, education, health and demography, political participation and criminal justice, and social and cultural continuity and change. These panels also included 22 additional members having relevant special knowledge. Biographical sketches of committee, panel, and staff members appear in Appendix B. The work of the committee, its panels, and its staff was aided by still other scholars and research specialists who prepared more than 30 commissioned papers; a list of papers is in Appendix C, along with a list of committee and panel meetings. Altogether, nearly 100 people thus brought their professional skills to the task of analyzing the status of black Americans during nearly five eventful decades of American history. We also note with thanks all those people who communicated with us in person, by mail and telephone, and by published commentaries. We thereby received many useful suggestions, and the report gained from the criticisms freely offered at all stages of its development.

The interdisciplinary character of the committee and its panels allowed our deliberations to draw on a wide range of knowledge and differing perspectives. The members also held strong convictions, of course, on many of the problems and issues that we considered. Consequently, our frequent meetings were marked by lively discussions, some surprising discoveries, and a lengthy process of debate and mutual education. By the end of 4 years of

immersion in the subject matter, an impressive convergence of views had developed, greatly facilitated by repeated confrontations with the accumulated evidence. Individual differences of view among the participants remain, of course, especially concerning questions of social policy. Still, the level and quality of agreement reached are noteworthy, and we appreciate the patience, objectivity, and vision of the participants in the study.

The committee notes its very special debt to David A. Goslin, then executive director of CBASSE, and Alexandra Wigdor, staff officer, whose indispensable initiatives conceived and developed the launching of the project within CBASSE. Crucial at many important points of the study were the advice and support of CBASSE executive director Robert Caplan, associate executive director Brett Hammond, and the two people who served as CBASSE chairs during the life of the study, Ira Hirsh and Robert McC. Adams.

We acknowledge with deep appreciation the generous financial support that made possible the completion of this enterprise. Accordingly, our special thanks go to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and the National Research Council Fund. The understanding and patience of foundation staffs have been of special importance.

Without the staff there would, of course, have been no report. The work of the senior staff, Lawrence Bobo, Thomas Cavanagh, John Brown Childs, Darnell Hawkins, and Mary Beth Moore, was crucial in preparing memoranda and other background materials covering the variety of topics discussed in the report. Reynolds Farley, as senior research consultant, was a major contributor to essential background materials and research analyses used in writing the report. Eugenia Grohman, associate director for reports of CBASSE, played an instrumental intellectual role in aiding the editors during the writing of the final draft of the report.

The background materials produced during the committee's work were rewritten, supplemented with additional material, and often reinterpreted by the committee, its chair, and its study director. The synthesis that forms the report is thus the sole responsibility of those individuals.

We hope that the evidence and analysis presented is compelling. Our touchstone has been credible evidence; our mandate, to describe and analyze. At the same time, the report necessarily deals directly with value-laden issues—discrimination, prejudice, equality of opportunity, inequality of condition. We have not avoided or minimized the deep contradictions and conflicts that surround these issues, and our diagnosis certainly leaves no ground for complacency. It is our hope that the report will provide a solid base for fruitful debate and reasonable policy initiatives in the years ahead.

We believe that the present critical synthesis deals with matters of central importance for the future of our society. We believe that research data and thoughtful analysis can help to tell us where we have come from and where we may be going in terms of the welfare of Americans. The differences in

the status of whites and blacks herein described do not overshadow the many crucial ways in which all our people are interdependent; we share a common destiny. The nation's future depends critically on the health, skill, and commitment of all of its people. Because of a unique past and distinctive present, the analysis of the special situation of black Americans is an essential part of any careful appraisal of American society.

GERALD DAVID JAYNES, *Study Director*
ROBIN M. WILLIAMS, JR., *Chair*
Committee on the Status of Black Americans

A COMMON DESTINY

BLACKS AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Just five decades ago, most black Americans could not work, live, shop, eat, seek entertainment, or travel where they chose. Even a quarter century ago—100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863—most blacks were effectively denied the right to vote. A large majority of blacks lived in poverty, and very few black children had the opportunity to receive a basic education; indeed, black children were still forced to attend inferior and separate schools in jurisdictions that had not accepted the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court declaring segregated schools unconstitutional.

Today the situation is very different. In education, many blacks have received college degrees from universities that formerly excluded them. In the workplace, blacks frequently hold professional and managerial jobs in desegregated settings. In politics, most blacks now participate in elections, and blacks have been elected to all but the highest political offices. Overall, many blacks have achieved middle-class status.

Yet the great gulf that existed between black and white Americans in 1939 has only been narrowed; it has not closed. One of three blacks still live in households with incomes below the poverty line. Even more blacks live in areas where ineffective schools, high rates of dependence on public assistance, severe problems of crime and drug use, and low and declining employment prevail. Race relations, as they affect the lives of inhabitants of these areas, differ considerably from black-white relations involving middle-class blacks. Lower status blacks have less access to desegregated schools, neighborhoods, and other institutions and public facilities. Their interactions with whites frequently emphasize their subordinate status—as low-skilled employees, public agency clients, and marginally performing pupils.

The status of black Americans today can be characterized as a glass that is half full—if measured by progress since 1939—or as a glass that is half empty—if measured by the persisting disparities between black and white Americans since the early 1970s. Any assessment of the quality of life for blacks is also complicated by the contrast between blacks who have achieved middle-class status and those who have not.

The progress occurred because sustained struggles by blacks and their allies changed American law and politics, moving all governments and most private institutions from support of principles of racial inequality to support of principles of racial equality. Gradually, and often with much resistance, the behaviors and attitudes of individual whites moved in the same direction. Over the 50-year span covered by this study, the social status of American blacks has *on average* improved dramatically, both in absolute terms and relative to whites. The growth of the economy and public policies promoting racial equality led to an erosion of segregation and discrimination, making it possible for a substantial fraction of blacks to enter the mainstream of American life.

The reasons for the continuing distress of large numbers of black Americans are complex. Racial discrimination continues despite the victories of the civil rights movement. Yet, the problems faced today by blacks who are isolated from economic and social progress are less directly open to political amelioration than were the problems of legal segregation and the widely practiced overt discrimination of a few decades past. Slow overall growth of the economy during the 1970s and 1980s has been an important impediment to black progress; in the three previous decades economic prosperity and rapid growth had been a great help to most blacks. Educational institutions and government policies have not successfully responded to underlying changes in the society. Opportunities for upward mobility have been reduced for all lower status Americans, but especially for those who are black. If all racial discrimination were abolished today, the life prospects facing many poor blacks would still constitute major challenges for public policy.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

This report summarizes and interprets a large body of data and research analyses concerning the position of blacks in American society since the eve of World War II. We write at a time 20 years after the Kerner Commission, following the summer riots of 1967, warned that ours was becoming a racially divided and unequal nation. We write 45 years after Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma* challenged Americans to bring their racial practices into line with their ideals. Despite clear evidence of progress against each problem, Americans face an unfinished agenda: many black Americans remain separated from the mainstream of national life under conditions of great inequality. The American dilemma has not been resolved.

The new "American dilemma" that has emerged after the civil rights era

of the 1960s results from two aspirations of black Americans: equal opportunity—the removal of barriers to employment, housing, education, and political activities—and the actual attainment of equality in participation in these sectors of life.

Central to the realization of these aspirations are national policies promoting equality of opportunity for the most disadvantaged blacks (especially in areas such as employment and education) and the preservation among black people of attitudes and behaviors toward self-help and individual sacrifice that have enabled them to benefit from such opportunities. Black-white relations are important in determining the degree to which equal opportunity exists for black Americans. Whites desire equality of treatment in social institutions and in governmental policy; however, many whites are less likely to espouse or practice equality of treatment for blacks in their personal behavior. Thus, at the core of black-white relations is a dynamic tension between many whites' expectations of American institutions and their expectations of themselves. This state of relations is a significant improvement from 45 years ago when majorities of white people supported discrimination against blacks in many areas of life. But the divergence between social principle and individual practice frequently leads to white avoidance of blacks in those institutions in which equal treatment is most needed. The result is that American institutions do not provide the full equality of opportunity that Americans desire.

Foremost among the reasons for the present state of black-white relations are two continuing consequences of the nation's long and recent history of racial inequality. One is the negative attitudes held toward blacks and the other is the actual disadvantaged conditions under which many black Americans live. These two consequences reinforce each other. Thus, a legacy of discrimination and segregation continues to affect black-white relations.

In the context of American history, this continuing legacy is not surprising. Racial and ethnic differences have had crucial effects on the course of American history. In particular, black Americans' central role in several constitutional crises—their past status as slaves and the debates over slavery during the Constitutional Convention of 1787; the fighting of the Civil War; the denial of blacks' basic citizenship until the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s—has frequently focused international attention on black-white relations in the United States. In view of this history, race is likely to retain much of its saliency as a feature of American society for some time.

Indeed, as the twenty-first century nears, demographic conditions will increase Americans' awareness that theirs is a multiracial society. The Bureau of the Census projects that the black population will increase from 11.7 percent of the U.S. total in 1980 to 15 percent in 2020; blacks will be nearly 1 of 5 children of school age and 1 of 6 adults of prime working age (25–54). Rising numbers of blacks will be represented both in influential occupations and positions, and among the poor, the least educated, and the jobless. At the same time, immigration trends are also increasing the numbers and proportions of Asian-Americans and Hispanics in the U.S. popula-

tion. Thus, the importance of racial and ethnic minorities in general to the nation's well-being is growing.

We can summarize our main findings on the status of blacks in America in the late 1980s succinctly:

- By almost all aggregate statistical measures—incomes and living standards; health and life expectancy; educational, occupational, and residential opportunities; political and social participation—the well-being of both blacks and whites has advanced greatly over the past five decades.
- By almost all the same indicators, blacks remain substantially behind whites.

Beyond this brief picture lies a more complex set of changes that affect the *relative* status of black Americans:

- The greatest economic gains for blacks occurred in the 1940s and 1960s. Since the early 1970s, the economic status of blacks relative to whites has, on average, stagnated or deteriorated.
- The political, educational, health, and cultural statuses of blacks showed important gains from the 1940s through the 1960s. In addition, some important indicators continued to improve after the early 1970s.
- Among blacks, the experiences of various groups have differed, and status differences among those groups have increased. Some blacks have attained high-status occupations, income, education, and political positions, but a substantial minority remain in disadvantaged circumstances.

These patterns of change have been largely determined by three factors:

- Political and social activism among black Americans and their white allies led to changes in governmental policies; particularly important were sweeping improvements in the legal status of blacks.
- Resistance to social change in race relations continues in American society.
- Broad changes in overall economic conditions, especially the post-1973 slowdown in the nation's economic growth, have significantly affected social and economic opportunities for all Americans.

The rest of this section explicates these main findings and their causes. The next section presents a summary of the committee's detailed findings for the various areas we studied. The final section presents the committee's conclusions and some projections for the future.

BLACKS AND WHITES IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Two general developments in the status of black Americans stand out; each is reflective of a near-identical development in the population at large.

First, for the period 1940–1973, real earnings of Americans improved steadily, but they stagnated and declined after 1973. Similarly, over these same periods, there was a clear record of improving average material status of blacks relative to whites followed by stagnation and decline. Second, during the post-1973 period, inequality increased among Americans as the lowest income and least skilled people were hurt most by changes in the overall economy. Similarly, there were increasing differences in material well-being and opportunities among blacks, and they have been extremely pronounced.

These developments may be understood as consequences of four interdependent events that have altered the status of blacks, relative black-white status, and race relations in the United States. These events were the urbanization and northern movement of the black population from 1940 to 1970; the civil rights movement that forced the nation to open its major institutions to black participation during the same three decades; the unprecedented high and sustained rate of national economic growth for roughly the same period; and the significant slowdown in the U.S. economy since the early 1970s.

The civil rights movement, blacks' more proximate location near centers of industrial activity, and high economic growth enabled those blacks best prepared to take advantage of new opportunities to respond with initiative and success. Increases in educational opportunities were seized by many blacks who were then able to translate better educations into higher status occupations than most blacks had ever enjoyed. Black incomes and earnings rose generally, with many individuals and families reaching middle-class and even upper middle income status (Chapter 6). The new black middle class moved into better housing, frequently in the suburbs, and sometimes in desegregated neighborhoods. Despite much confrontation between whites and blacks as blacks abandoned traditional approaches to black-white relations, race relations eventually advanced closer to equal treatment.

At the same time, many blacks were not able to take advantage of the new conditions that developed: some were still located in areas relatively untouched by the changes; some lacked the family support networks to provide assistance; for some, better opportunities simply did not arise. Those who were left behind during the 1960s and 1970s faced and still face very different situations than poor blacks immediately before that period.

A major reason is the performance of the economy. Real weekly earnings (in constant 1984 dollars) of all American men, on average, fell from $488 in 1969 to $414 in 1984; real weekly earnings of women fell from $266 in 1969 to $230 in 1984. For the first time since the Great Depression of the 1930s, American men born in one year (e.g., 1960) may face lower lifetime real earnings than men born 10 years earlier (Chapter 1). Among the myriad and complex responses to these economic conditions have been rising employment rates among women, but falling rates among men, while the unemployment rates of both men and women have been on an upward trend for three decades (Chapter 6).

A generation ago, a low-skilled man had relatively abundant opportunity

to obtain a blue-collar job with a wage adequate to support a family at a lower middle class level or better. Today the jobs available to such men—and women—are often below or just barely above the official poverty line for a family of four. For example, black males aged 25–34, with some high school but no diploma, earned on average $268 weekly in 1986; in 1969, black male dropouts of that age had averaged $334 weekly (in constant 1984 dollars). For white men of the same age and education, work conditions have been better, but changes over time cannot be said to have been good: in the years 1969 and 1986, mean weekly earnings were $447 and $381. Thus, among men who did not complete high school, blacks and whites had lower real earnings in 1986 than in 1969.

Obtaining a well-paying job increasingly requires a good education or a specific skill. Many young blacks and whites do not obtain such training, and the educational system in many locations is apparently not equipped to provide them. Recent reports on the state of American education sound great alarm about the future status of today's students. One in six youths dropped out of high school in 1985, and levels of scholastic achievement are disturbingly low by many measures. Young men with poor credentials, finding themselves facing low-wage job offers and high unemployment rates, frequently abandon the labor force intermittently or completely. Some choose criminal activity as an alternative to the labor market.

Greater numbers of people are today susceptible to poverty than in the recent past. With some year-to-year variation, the percentage of Americans living in poverty has been on an upward trend: from 11.2 percent in 1974 to 13.5 percent in 1986. In addition, the poor may be getting poorer in the 1980s: the average poor family has persistently had a yearly income further below the poverty line than any year since 1963.

More and more of the poor are working family heads, men and women who are employed or seeking employment but who cannot find a job that pays enough to prevent their families from sliding into or near poverty. For the more fortunate, reasonably secure from the fear of poverty, such middle-class advantages as a home in the suburbs and the ability to send their children to the best college for which they qualify are goals that were reached by their parents but may be unattainable for many of them.

Perhaps the most important consequences of the stagnating U.S. economy have been the effects on the status of children. Many members of the next generation of young adults live in conditions ill suited to prepare them to contribute to the nation's future. In 1987, 1 of 5 (20 percent) American children under age 18—white, black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian-American—were being raised in families with incomes below official poverty standards. Among minorities the conditions were worse: for example, 45 percent of black children and 39 percent of Hispanic children were living in poverty. During the 1970s, approximately 2 of every 3 black children could expect to live in poverty for at least 1 of the first 10 years of their childhood, while an astounding 1 of 3 could expect at least 7 of those 10 years to be lived in poverty.

We cannot emphasize too much the gravity of the fact that in any given year more than two-fifths of all black children live under conditions of poverty as the 1980s draw to a close. As fertility rates decrease, the total youth population of the United States will contain a larger proportion of comparatively disadvantaged youths from minority ethnic and racial groups. This change may in turn lead to major changes in labor markets, childbearing, the armed forces, and education.

Under conditions of increasing economic hardship for the least prosperous members of society, blacks, because of their special legacy of poverty and discrimination, are afflicted sooner, more deeply, and longer. But the signs of distress that are most visible in parts of the black population are becoming more discernible within the entire population. This distress should be viewed in the context of the underlying changes within American society that affect not only black-white differences, but all disadvantaged blacks and whites who face the difficult economic conditions of the late 1980s.

DETERMINANTS OF BLACK STATUS

One major determinant of black status has been noted in the previous sections: the stagnation of the U.S. economy since 1973, which has particularly hurt lower class blacks. In this section we note two other determinants: organizational and individual resistance to change, intended and otherwise, that has erected and maintained barriers to black opportunities; and the policies of governments and private organizations aimed at improving blacks' position, which have resulted in large measure from black activism, initiative, and self-identity.

Barriers and disadvantages persist in blocking black advancement. Three such barriers to full opportunity for black Americans are residential segregation, continuance of diffuse and often indirect discrimination, and exclusion from social networks essential for full access to economic and educational opportunities (Chapters 2–7). These barriers also existed for blacks who overcame them in earlier decades, but those successes were achieved in an economy that was growing rapidly and providing good wage opportunities even to low-skilled and less educated job seekers. In the 1960s, blacks seeking to help themselves also were benefited by a society more willing to expend energy and resources toward improving opportunities for the poor and minorities.

The past five decades have shown that purposeful actions and policies by governments and private institutions make a large difference in the opportunities and conditions of black Americans. Such purposeful actions and policies have been essential for past progress, and further progress is unlikely without them. Many blacks attained middle-class status because government and private programs enabled them to achieve better educations and jobs, through employment and education programs and government enforcement of equal employment opportunity (Chapters 5–8).

Black initiative and identity have increasingly played primary roles in bring-

ing about changes in government and private institutions and improvements in blacks' economic, social, and political status. This is of course evident in blacks' leadership of the civil rights movement and in their response to industrial opportunity during the great rural-to-urban migration of 1940–1970. But it is also evident in the strivings of individuals to finish high school or attain higher education; to enter a predominantly white factory, secretarial pool, or corporate law office; or to desegregate an entire institution, such as a professional sport, military combat corps, or legislative body (Chapters 2 and 4).

Many blacks who have not succeeded live in environments in which social conditions and individual behavioral patterns are often detrimental to self-improvement. Such behaviors may be natural responses to group conditions and social forces perceived as beyond personal control. One-half of black families with children must manage their affairs with only one parent—almost always a mother. These families are overwhelmingly poor (59 percent were below the poverty line in 1987), have high rates of dependence on family assistance benefits, and live in areas with a high percentage of families in similar circumstances (Chapters 6 and 10).

Why do such behaviors and conditions persist? There are no simple answers to this crucial question and no answers that can be validated as scientific findings. We can say, however, that the evidence does not support some popular hypotheses that purport to explain female-headed households, high birth rates to unmarried women, low labor force participation by males, or poor academic performance solely on the basis of government support programs or, more generally, on the existence of a "culture of poverty" among the black poor. Black-white cultural differences have narrowed since 1960, not widened (Chapters 2–4 and 10).

Our analysis of the problem does identify a number of important contributory factors. Discrimination plays an important role in the lives of many blacks, and even in the absence of discrimination the opportunities of many blacks are limited. Black youths in poor environments probably anticipate little payoff from working for academic achievement and may underestimate their opportunities. Those in poorly staffed, dilapidated schools populated with underachieving students can easily fall into the trap of perceiving the pursuit of academic excellence as a poor investment (Chapter 7). Inequalities in economic status to a large extent cause and interact with other status features to maintain overall black-white differences in status. Consequently, status gaps between blacks and whites will remain as long as blacks' economic status lags behind that of whites. For example, differences in black-white voting patterns result from persistent economic and social inequalities that impede electoral participation regardless of race; individual blacks now participate as much or more than whites of comparable socioeconomic status (Chapter 5). Similarly, differences in socioeconomic status account for the entire black-white difference in high school dropout rates (Chapter 7). In health, differences in black and white infant mortality are similarly linked to differences in economic status (Chapter 8). In the criminal justice system,

much of the differential sentencing of blacks and whites can be attributed to differences between sentences for defendants of higher and lower economic status (Chapter 9).

Yet the status of blacks is determined by the presence of both racial stratification and class (position within the socioeconomic structure of society). Changes in black-white relations and social opportunities do not affect blacks of different status in similar ways. For example, because of higher geographic concentrations of poor households among blacks, segregated residential areas affect the quality of schools and medical care available to low-income blacks more than they affect the availability of these resources to higher income blacks or low-income whites. And we have already noted that changes in the national economy have had particularly negative effects on lower status Americans, white and black. But changes have been most detrimental to the fortunes of blacks, and opportunities were curtailed most for blacks of lowest status (Chapter 6).

A RECORD OF THE STATUS OF BLACK AMERICANS

This section presents the committee's detailed findings on the status of black Americans. The presentation follows the topical approach of the material in Chapters 2–10 of the report.

ATTITUDES, PARTICIPATION, IDENTITY, AND INSTITUTIONS

Large majorities of blacks and whites accept the principles of equal access to public institutions and equal treatment in race relations. For whites this is the result of a long upward trend from a low base in the 1940s; blacks have favored equality since survey data have been collected. Yet there remain important signs of continuing resistance to full equality of black Americans. Principles of equality are endorsed less when they would result in close, frequent, or prolonged social contact, and whites are much less prone to endorse policies meant to implement equal participation of blacks in important social institutions. In practice, many whites refuse or are reluctant to participate in social settings (e.g., neighborhoods and schools) in which significant numbers of blacks are present; see Figures S-1, S-2, and S-3.

Whether one considers arts and entertainment, religious institutions, public schools, or a number of other major institutions, black participation has increased significantly since 1940 and since 1960. Yet increased black participation has not produced substantial integration. An exception is the U.S. Army, where a true modicum of integration—significant numerical participation on terms of equal treatment—has been accomplished. The other three military services, although generally ahead of the civilian sector, have not attained the level of equality found in the Army. Although large-scale desegregation of public schools occurred in the South during the late 1960s and early 1970s—and has been substantial in many small and medium-sized cities

FIGURE S-1 Whites with *no* objection to sending their children to a school in which a few or more than half of the children are black.

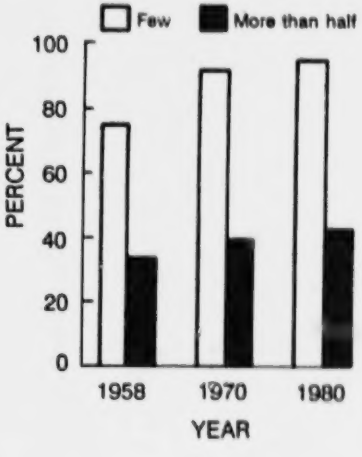


FIGURE S-2 Whites who would *not* move if black people came to live next door or in great numbers in the neighborhood.

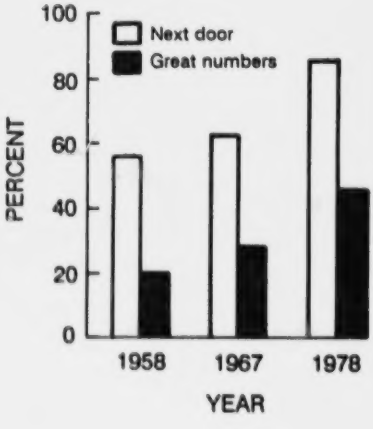
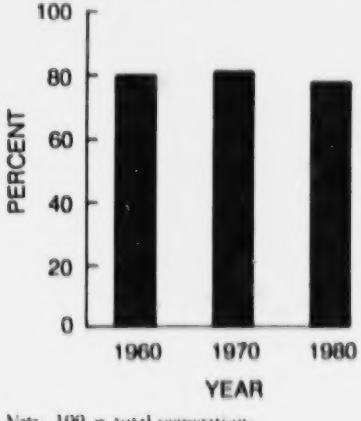


FIGURE S-3 Median residential segregation in 29 metropolitan areas with the largest black populations.



Note: 100 = total segregation;
0 = no segregation.

elsewhere—the pace of school desegregation has slowed, and racial separation in education is significant, especially outside the South. And residential separation of whites and blacks in large metropolitan areas remains nearly as high in the 1980s as it was in the 1960s.

These findings suggest that a considerable amount of remaining black-white inequality is due to continuing discriminatory treatment of blacks. The clearest evidence is in housing. Discrimination against blacks seeking housing has been conclusively demonstrated. In employment and public accommodations, discrimination, although greatly reduced, is still a problem (Chapter 3).

The long history of discrimination and segregation produced among blacks a heightened sense of group consciousness and a stronger orientation toward collective values and behavior than exists generally among Americans, and group consciousness remains strong among blacks today (Chapters 3–5). Contemporary conditions in the United States reinforce a recognition of group identity and position among blacks, who continue to be conspicuously separated from the white majority. This separation is manifested in a range of specific findings: two findings of special importance are separation of blacks and whites in residential areas and public schools. The residential separation of blacks and whites is nearly twice the rate of white and Asian-Americans, and it is often much greater than residential separation between Hispanic Americans and whites in many cities (Chapters 2–3).

These past experiences and current conditions have important consequences for the status of blacks and the manner in which they attempt to improve their status. Blacks overwhelmingly believe in values such as individual responsibility and free competition, but they are more likely to disapprove of the ubiquity of individualism and market autonomy throughout American society than are whites. This disapproval has appeared primarily in black support, at levels higher than whites, of such federal policies as guaranteed full employment, guaranteed income floors, and national health care (Chapter 5).

Given blacks' history, the sources of this desire for change are not difficult to identify. Data show that blacks generally believe that basic social institutions are biased in favor of whites and against blacks (Chapters 3–5). Many blacks believe that their relative position in society cannot be improved without government policies to intervene with social institutions on behalf of minorities and the disadvantaged. In contrast with whites, blacks have highly favorable views of the high activity years of government policy intervention of the 1960s.

As a consequence of their heightened group consciousness, their belief that racial discrimination remains a major deterrent to black progress, and their history of collective social expression, black Americans vote at the same or higher rates than whites of comparable socioeconomic status, support redistributive policies more often than do whites, and participate in a wider variety of political activity.

This political participation has had some important effects on American

politics. After the legislative and judicial successes of the civil rights movement during the 1960s, there have been continuous struggles to enforce laws and administrative measures aimed at eliminating discrimination and improving opportunities. As a result, blacks' right of access to public facilities and accommodations is now widely accepted. Arbitrary harassment and intimidation of blacks by legal authorities, by organized antiblack organizations, and by unorganized individuals have greatly diminished, although there are regular reports of such incidents.

The changes since 1940—and particularly since the 1960s—have had important effects on the nature of black communities. The organizations and institutions created by blacks, as well as changing concepts of black identity, were two crucial foundations on which the achievement of sweeping improvements in blacks' legal and political status were attained. Changes in black social structure have resulted from the rising incomes, occupations, and educations of many blacks. The exit of higher status blacks from inner cities has accentuated problems of increasing social stratification among blacks. The service needs of poorer blacks have placed strains on many black institutions, including schools, churches, and voluntary service organizations. These strains have resulted in a proliferation of activities devoted to the material needs of poor blacks by black organizations (Chapter 4).

Other effects on black institutions and organizations have been produced by the civil rights movement. Greater access to majority white institutions by higher status blacks' has led to alterations in black leadership structure, problems of recruitment and retention of black talent by black organizations, and reduced participation in many spheres of black life by those blacks. As a result, the often well-knit, if poor and underserviced, black communities of the past have lost some of their cultural cohesion and distinct identity. However, most blacks retain a high degree of racial pride and a conscious need to retain aspects of black culture as a significant component of their American identity. Because of these desires and needs, black institutions continue to play important roles in the lives of most blacks.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Until the 1960s, black political activity was primarily directed toward the attainment of basic democratic rights. Exclusion of black Americans from voting and office holding meant that blacks had to seek political and civil rights through protest and litigation. The civil rights movement arose out of long-standing grievances and aspirations. It was based on strong networks of local organizations and given a clear focus and direction by articulate leadership. Because most blacks were unable to vote, move freely, or buy and sell property as they wished, their efforts were directed to the objective of attaining these basic rights of citizenship. During the civil rights movement, civic equality and political liberty came to be viewed by increasing percentages of Americans as basic human rights that blacks should enjoy. By the

FIGURE S-4 Reported voter participation as a percentage of the voting-age population, by race.

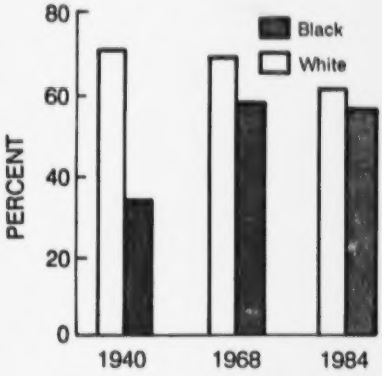


FIGURE S-5 Black elected officials.

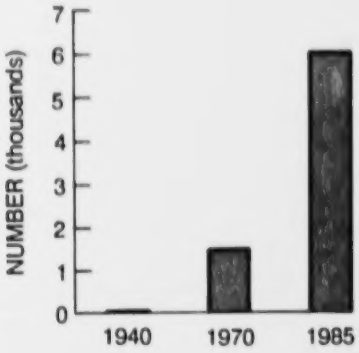


FIGURE S-6 Black national convention delegates, by party.

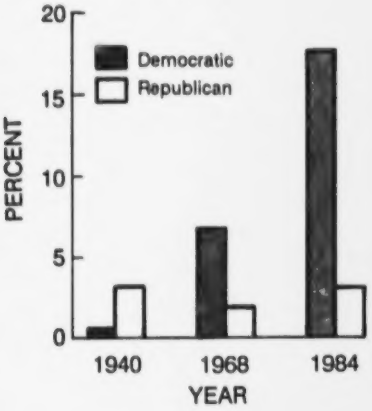
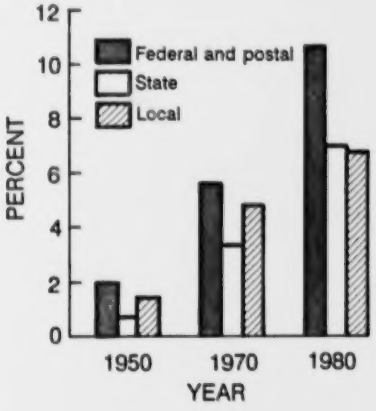


FIGURE S-7 Black officials and administrators, by level of government.



1960s, the federal executive branch and a congressional coalition backed by a sufficient public opinion was finally able to legislate black civil equality.

Active participation by blacks in American political life has had a major impact on their role in the society. Figures S-4 to S-7 highlight some of the effects. The number of black elected officials has risen from a few dozen in 1940 to over 6,800 in 1988. However, blacks comprise only about 1.5 percent of all elected officials. The election of black officials does result in additional hiring and higher salaries for blacks in public-sector jobs and more

senior positions for blacks in appointive public office. The black proportion of federal, state, and local public administrators rose from less than 1 percent in 1940 to 8 percent in 1980; even so, it was less than blacks' 13 percent proportion of the U.S. population. As measured by the proportion of delegates to the national party conventions, black participation in the political party organizations has increased dramatically among Democrats since 1940, while black participation in Republican party affairs, after declining during the 1960s and 1970s, has returned to be about the same level as in 1940.

Blacks' desires for political rights were not merely based on abstract principles of equality, but also on the practical fruits of political participation. Blacks sought democratic rights because they believed that direct access to political institutions through voting, lobbying, and office holding would lead to greater material equality between themselves and the rest of society. However, changes in blacks' socioeconomic status, although complex, have not attained levels commensurate to black-white equality with respect to civil rights. But black influence in the political sector has been an important factor in determining many of the important gains that have occurred. In particular, the extensive development of equal opportunity law has improved the status of blacks (as well as that of women and other minorities) in the areas of education, occupations, health care, criminal justice, and business enterprise. Blacks have also benefited from increased public-sector provision of job training, health care, Social Security, and other cash and in-kind benefit programs.

Although political participation has not been the only important determinant of changes in black opportunities, resulting alterations in American politics have had influence in many areas of life. A review of blacks' status shows that increased civil rights have been important in all areas of society.

ECONOMIC STATUS

Changes in labor market conditions and social policies of governments have had many beneficial effects on the economic status of black Americans. Yet the current economic prospects are not good for many blacks. Adverse changes in labor market opportunities and family conditions—falling real wages and employment, increases in one-parent families with one or no working adults—have made conditions especially difficult for those blacks from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. However, among blacks, changes in family structure per se have not been a major cause of continuing high poverty rates since the early 1970s.

Black-white differences are large despite significant improvements in the absolute and relative positions of blacks over the past 50 years. After initial decades of rising relative black economic status, black gains stagnated on many measures after the early 1970s. Lack of progress in important indicators of economic status during the past two decades is largely a consequence of two conflicting trends: while blacks' weekly and hourly wages have risen relative to whites, blacks' relative employment rates have deteriorated significantly. Figures S-8 to S-11 present some key data.

FIGURE S-8 Persons below the poverty level, by race.

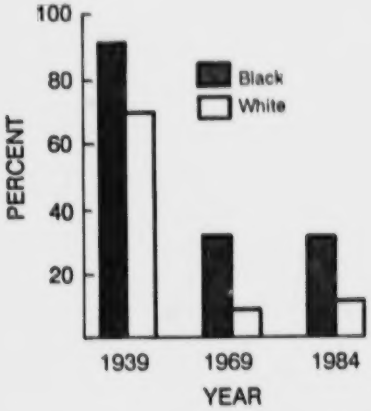
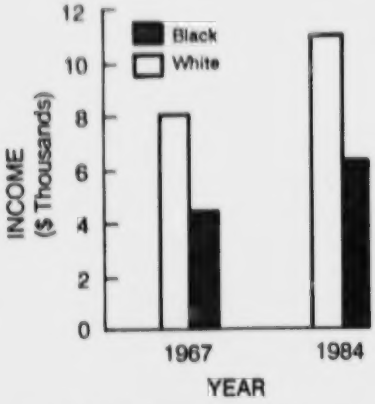


FIGURE S-9 Per capita income, by race.



Note: Per capita income is calculated in 1984 constant dollars.

In terms of per capita incomes, family incomes, and male workers' earnings, blacks gained relative to whites fairly steadily from 1939 to 1969; measures of relative status peaked in the early to mid-1970s and since have remained stagnant or declined. Women earn much less than men, but the gap between black and white women decreased steadily throughout the period until, by 1984, black women had earnings very close to those of white women. Employment rates of adult black men and women have been falling relative to those of white men and women throughout the period; black unemployment rates remain approximately twice those of white rates. The proportion of working black men and women in white-collar occupations and in managerial and professional positions increased throughout the period, but these gains show signs of slowing in the 1980s.

Uneven change in the average economic position of blacks has been accompanied, especially during the past 25 years, by accentuated differences in status among blacks. An important aspect of the polarization in the incomes of black families has been the growth of female-headed black families since 1960. It is among such families that the incidence of poverty is highest. It is no exaggeration to say that the two most numerically important components of the black class structure have become a lower class dominated by female-headed families and a middle class largely composed of two-parent families. The percentage of both blacks and whites living in households with incomes below the poverty line declined during the 1939–1975 period. But poverty rates have risen in the past decade, and black poverty rates have been 2 to 3 times higher than white rates at all times.

The major developments accounting for black gains in earnings and occu-

FIGURE S-10 Employment to population ratios, by race.

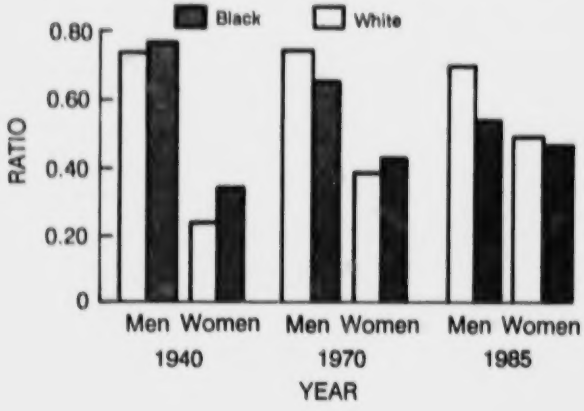
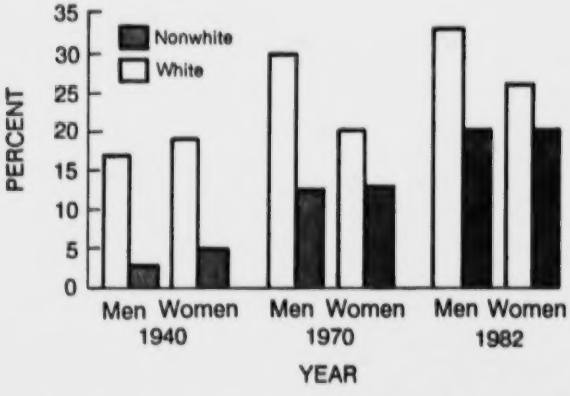


FIGURE S-11 Employed workers holding professional or managerial jobs, by race.



pation status from 1939 to 1969 were South-to-North migration and concurrent movement from agricultural to nonagricultural employment, job creation, and national economic growth. After 1965, major factors responsible for improvements in blacks' status have been government policies against discrimination, government incentives for the equal employment opportunity of minorities, general changes in race relations, and higher educational attainment.

SCHOOLING

Substantial progress has been made toward the provision of educational resources to blacks. Yet black and white educational opportunities are not generally equal. Standards of academic performance for teachers and students are not equivalent in schools that serve predominantly black students and those that serve predominantly white students. Nor are equal encouragement and support provided for the educational achievement and attainment of black and white students. Figures S-12, S-13, and S-14 highlight some of the effects of the progress that has been made and the gaps that remain.

Measures of educational outcomes—attainment and achievement—reveal substantial gaps between blacks and whites. Blacks, on average, enter the schools with substantial disadvantages in socioeconomic backgrounds and tested achievement. American schools do not compensate for these disadvantages in background: on average, students leave the schools with black-white gaps not having been appreciably diminished.

There remain persistent and large gaps in the schooling quality and achievement outcomes of education for blacks and whites. At the pinnacle of the educational process, blacks' life opportunities relative to whites' are demonstrated by the fact that the odds that a black high school graduate will enter college within a year of graduation are less than one-half the odds that a white high school graduate will do so. College enrollment rates of high school graduates, after rising sharply since the late 1960s, declined in the mid-1970s; while white enrollment rates have recovered, black rates in the 1980s remain well below those of the 1970s. The proportion of advanced degrees awarded to blacks has also decreased. While we cannot conclude with certainty that the cause has been the decline in (real) financial aid grants to students, other reasonable hypotheses can explain only a negligible component of this change.

Segregation and differential treatment of blacks continue to be widespread in the elementary and secondary schools. We find that school desegregation does not substantially affect the academic performance of white students, but it does modestly improve black performance (in particular, reading). When several key conditions are met, intergroup attitudes and relations improve after schools are desegregated. And desegregation is most likely to reduce racial isolation as well as improve academic and social outcomes for blacks when it is part of a comprehensive and rapid desegregation plan.

Differences in the schooling experienced by black and white students contribute to black-white differences in achievement. These differences are closely tied to teacher behavior; school climate; and the content, quality, and organization of instruction. Early intervention compensatory education programs, such as Head Start, have had positive effects on blacks' educational performance. Among the most recent cohorts to complete their education—people born in the late 1950s and early 1960s—blacks have a median education close to that of whites, 12.6 years, compared with 12.9 years for whites. But a remaining substantial gap in overall

FIGURE S-12 High school graduates aged 25–29, by race.

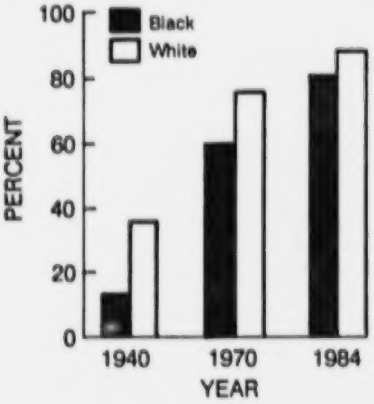
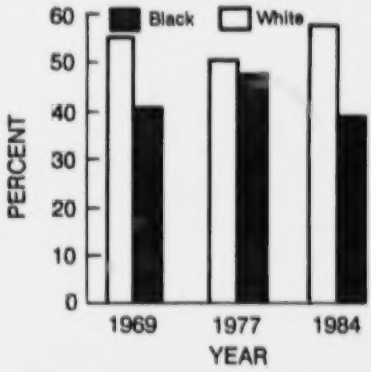
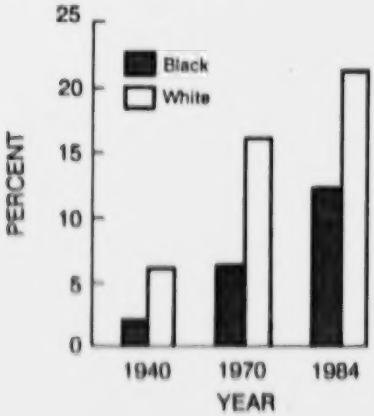


FIGURE S-13 High school graduates enrolled in college, by race.



Note: Percentages are smoothed 3-year averages.

FIGURE S-14 College graduates aged 25–29, by race.



educational attainment is noncompletion: high school dropout rates for blacks are double those for whites.

Changes in academic achievement test scores show that, while black students' average scores remain well below white students' average scores, black performance has improved faster, and black-white differences have become somewhat smaller.

HEALTH

There have been substantial improvements in life expectancy and health status for Americans since 1940. However, overall gains have not been evenly shared. Poor blacks, people on Medicaid, and uninsured groups have unmet needs despite expanded health services. Since 1982, access to health care may be worsening for these groups: 22 percent of blacks and 14 percent of whites under age 65 are not covered by private health insurance or Medicaid.

Persisting wide gaps in the mortality and morbidity of blacks compared to whites remain at all ages except among the oldest old (people 85 and older). Figures S-15, S-16, and S-17 highlight a few aspects of the health status of black Americans. Infant mortality rates have dropped steadily since 1940, for both whites and blacks, but the odds of dying shortly after birth are consistently twice as high for blacks as for whites.

Blacks are underrepresented in the health professions (as compared to their population percentage); this is important since access to care by minorities and the poor increases with the availability of minority providers.

Preventive or remedial interventions could reduce black-white health gaps at each period of the life cycle. Access to early and appropriate prenatal care prevents low birthweight, infant mortality, and infant neurological damage and other morbidity and reduces maternal mortality. Prenatal care for black mothers lags behind that for whites.

Significant improvement in the health status of blacks will also depend on reducing health-damaging personal behaviors such as substance abuse, injuries (accidental and nonaccidental), homicide, and sexual activities that can

FIGURE S-15 Life expectancy at birth, by race.

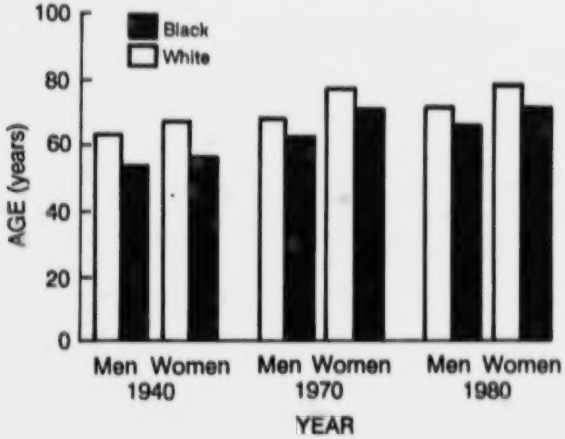


FIGURE S-16 Annual number of physician visits per capita, by race.

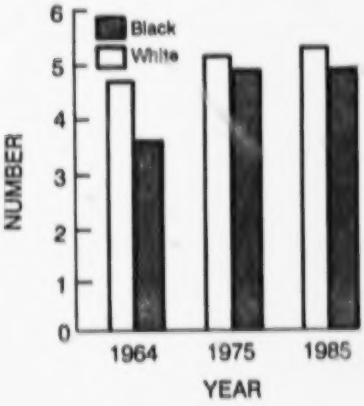
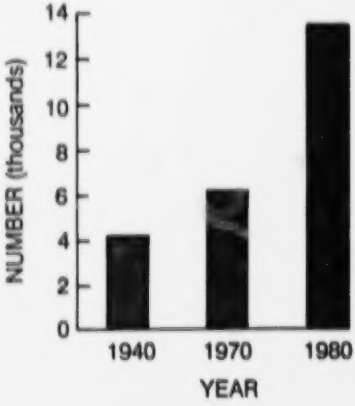


FIGURE S-17 Black physicians.



cause ill-timed pregnancy or risk infection with sexually transmitted diseases. Slowing the transmission rate of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in the black community is critical. This will require preventive strategies tailored to the special needs of intravenous drug users and other groups at high risk for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. Risky behavior is an increasing health problem among young blacks: for example, the homicide rate is more than 6 times higher for black men than for white men.

In adulthood, the cumulative effects of health disadvantages and delaying medical visits until conditions are serious predispose black adults to higher incidences of chronic illness and disability. Preventive health services as well as assured continuity in management of chronic health conditions would reduce deaths and disability. Poverty and limited bed capacity in care centers, combined with discrimination, pose special problems of access to long-term health care for elderly blacks.

CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Among black Americans, distrust of the criminal justice system is widespread. Historically, discrimination against blacks in arrests and sentencing was ubiquitous. Prior to the 1970s, very few blacks were employed as law enforcement officials, but in the 1980s, the percentage of blacks in police forces has increased to substantial levels. Black representation among attorneys and judges has also increased, although it is not as high as that in the police.

Blacks are arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for criminal offenses at rates much higher than are whites. Currently, blacks account for nearly one-half

of all prison inmates in the United States; thus, blacks' representation in prisons is about 4 times their representation in the general population. Compared with the total population, black Americans are disproportionately victims of crime: they are twice as likely to be victims of robbery, vehicle theft, and aggravated assault, and 6 to 7 times as likely to be victims of homicide, the leading cause of death among young black males. Blacks also suffer disproportionately from injuries and economic losses due to criminal actions.

Most black offenders victimize other blacks. But offenders and victims are often in different socioeconomic strata: most offenders are poor; many victims are not. Consequently, middle-income and near-poor blacks have greater economic losses due to criminal acts than the black poor or than whites at any income level.

The role of discrimination in criminal justice has apparently varied substantially from place to place and over time. Some part of the unexplained differences in black-white arrest rates may be due to racial bias and the resulting differential treatment. Current black-white differences in sentencing appear to be due less to overt racial bias than to socioeconomic differences between blacks and whites: people of lower socioeconomic status—regardless of race—receive more severe sentences than people of higher status. An important exception may be bias in sentencing that is related to the race of the victim: criminals whose victims are white are on average punished more severely than those whose victims are black.

As long as there are great disparities in the socioeconomic status of blacks and whites, blacks will continue to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system as victims and offenders. And because of these disparities, the precise degree to which the overrepresentation reflects racial bias cannot be determined.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Changes since the mid-1960s among both blacks and whites have brought higher rates of marital breakup, decreased rates of marriage, rapidly rising proportions of female-headed households, and increasing proportions of children being reared in single-parent families. The changes have been much greater among blacks than among whites. Some characteristics of families are shown in Figures S-18, S-19, and S-20.

Birthrates for both the white and black populations have fallen since the baby boom of the 1950s, and fertility rates have declined for women of all ages. By the mid-1980s, the lifetime fertility rates were similar for black and white women. Contrary to popular myth, birthrates among black teenagers—although still an important problem—have declined significantly during the past two decades.

In 1970, about 18 percent of black families had incomes over $35,000 (1987 constant dollars); by 1986 this proportion had grown to 22 percent. The increase in well-to-do families was matched by an increase in low-income

FIGURE S-18 Children in poverty, by race.

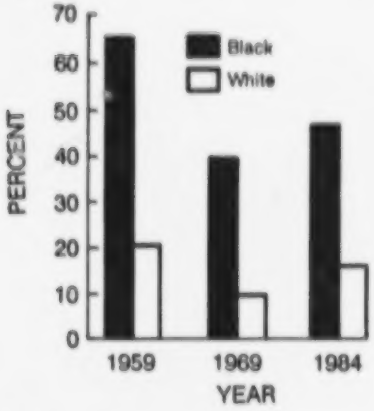
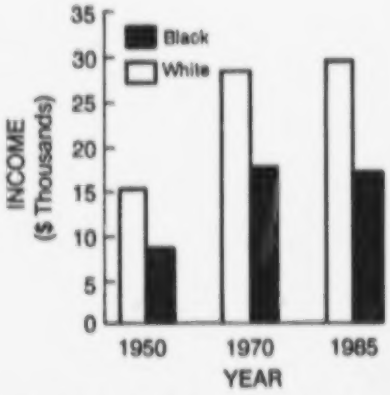
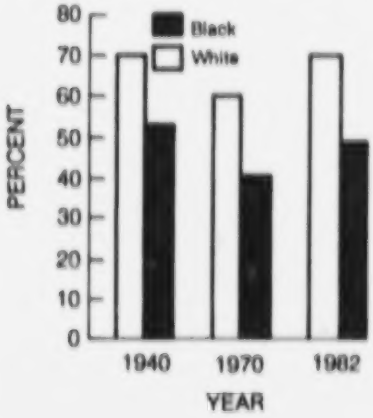


FIGURE S-19 Median family income, by race.



Note: Median family income is calculated in 1985 constant dollars.

FIGURE S-20 Childless women aged 20–24, by race.



families. During the same 1970–1980 period, the proportion of black families with incomes of less than $10,000 grew from about 26 to 30 percent. After declining during earlier decades, the percentage of black and white children in poverty began to increase in the 1970s. In 1986, 43 percent of black children and 16 percent of white children under age 18 lived in households below the poverty line.

Black and white children are increasingly different with regard to their living arrangements. As we noted above, a majority of black children under age 18 live in families that include their mothers but not their fathers; in contrast, four of every five white children live with both parents. (Although some fathers who are not counted as household members may actually aid in child rearing, there are no data to estimate the number, and it is believed to be small.) In the course of their childhood, 86 percent of black children and 42 percent of white children are likely to spend some time in a single-parent household.

The greater inequality between family types among blacks has important consequences for the welfare of future generations. Black female-headed families were 50 percent of all black families with children in 1985, but had 25 percent of total black family income, while 70 percent of black family income was received by black husband-wife families.

The data and analyses we have examined throw doubt on the validity of the thesis that a culture of poverty is a major cause of long-term poverty. Although cultural factors are important in social behavior, arguments for the existence of unalterable behaviors among the poor are not supported by empirical research. The behaviors that are detrimental to success are often responses to existing social barriers to opportunity. The primary correlates of poverty are macroeconomic conditions of prosperity or recession and changes in family composition. However, increases in female-headed families have had only negligible effects on increasing black poverty rates since the mid-1970s. Importantly, attitudes toward work and the desire to succeed are not very different among the poor and the nonpoor.

Black-white differences in family structures result from a complex set of interrelated factors. The most salient are black-white differences in income and employment, greater (relative) economic independence of black women, and a more limited pool of black men who are good marriage prospects.

THE FUTURE: ALTERNATIVES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

BLACKS' STATUS IN THE NEAR FUTURE

In assessing the status of black Americans, we have asked what roles blacks play in the nation today and what role they are likely to play in the near future. Our conclusion is largely positive, but it is mixed. The great majority

of black Americans contribute to the political, economic, and social health of the nation. The typical black adult—like the typical white adult—is a full-time employee or homemaker who pays taxes, votes in public elections, and sends children to school. Blacks make important contributions to all forms of American life, from the sciences and health care, to politics and education, to arts and entertainment.

However, this role is not available to a sizable minority of black—and of a small but growing group of white—Americans. The evidence for this assessment is clear. High school dropout rates among young black adults have risen, and attaining high standards of academic competence seems unavailable to millions of poor black youths attending school systems that are not able to teach them. During the 1980s, thousands of young black men who were not enrolled in school have also not been active participants in the labor market. Many of these men are incarcerated or have dropped out of society into the escape offered by alcohol and drug addiction. And, on the basis of the fertility rates of 1986, 170 of 1,000 black females become mothers before the age of 20, often disrupting or discontinuing their secondary educations. These young mothers are likely to be poor as they establish households, and they will frequently have to receive family assistance benefits. These alarming developments are mirrored by similar, if more modest, trends among whites.

Barring unforeseen events or changes in present conditions—that is, no changes in educational policies and opportunities, no increased income and employment opportunities, and no major national programs to deal directly with the problems of economic dependency—our findings imply several negative developments for blacks in the near future, developments that in turn do not bode well for American society:

- A substantial majority of black Americans will remain contributors to the nation, but improvements in their status relative to whites are likely to slow even more as the rate of increase of the black middle class is likely to decline.
- Approximately one-third of the black population will continue to be poor, and the relative employment and earnings status of black men is likely to deteriorate further.
- Drugs and crime, teenage parenthood, poor educational opportunities, and joblessness will maintain their grip on large numbers of poor and near-poor blacks.
- High rates of residential segregation between blacks and whites will continue.
- The United States is faced with the prospect of continued great inequality between whites and blacks and a continuing division of social status within the black population.
- A growing population of poor and undereducated citizens, disproportionately black and minority, will pose challenges to the nation's abilities to solve the emerging economic and social problems of the twenty-first century.

These short-term projections emerge as important implications of our assessment of the status of black Americans and of black-white relations since 1940. They are especially crucial to the future well-being of the United States, as a common destiny continues to connect black and other Americans. Throughout the five decades covered by this report, all Americans have been affected by the same general social processes: technological change, national and international economic developments, and large population movements. Generally, when conditions have been improving for blacks, they have been improving for the entire population. Yet while the same general factors affect all Americans in similar ways, blacks—who as a group still carry many of the effects of systematic discrimination and segregation—are especially sensitive both to changes in the national economy and to changes in public policies.

RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

Time alone does not resolve America's racial problems. When the status of blacks has improved, it has not been simply because time has passed. Two reasons for the continuing exclusion of many blacks from the economic mainstream are persisting discriminatory barriers and the residential concentration of poor blacks. It is therefore appropriate to consider the future prospects for reducing current levels of black residential separation.

Black-white residential segregation declined more in the 1970s than in previous decades. Despite these changes, however, levels of black-white segregation remain very high. Considering the 16 metropolitan areas that had the largest black populations in 1980 and using an index for which 100 means all blacks and all whites live in distinct racially homogeneous neighborhoods and zero if all people are randomly distributed, the average index value for black-white residential segregation was about 80. This reflects a drop of about 6 points, on average, from the segregation level of 1970. In contrast, one can compare the indices for Hispanic and Asian-Americans, who entered many metropolitan areas in large numbers during the 1970s. One might expect them to be highly segregated from whites, but their segregation indices average about 45 points. If the historically high 1970s pace of reduction in black-white segregation were to persist, it would take about 60 years for the black-white index to fall to the values currently observed for Hispanic and Asian-Americans.

INCOME AND POVERTY

Between 1940 and 1974, poverty as officially measured by cash income declined sharply. The percentage of blacks living in poor households fell from 92 percent in 1939 to 30 percent in 1974; among whites, the change was from 65 to 9 percent. If that trend had continued, the percentage of poor people in the year 2000 would be about 1 percent among whites and

9 percent among blacks. However, the trends toward lower poverty rates came to an end in the early 1970s; since 1974 rates have stagnated or even increased. If the post-1974 trend is extrapolated to the year 2000, the poverty rate among blacks will be about 32 percent and the rate among whites about 15 percent. These are approximately the rates of the late 1960s. Of course such predictions are tentative, since economic conditions or government policies could change.

A similar picture results from the projection of current trends in the incomes of black families vis-à-vis those of white families. When the Bureau of the Census first measured family incomes in 1947, blacks' median incomes were 51 percent of whites'. During the years of economic expansion and civil rights legislation, the status of blacks improved: by 1974, the median income of black families was 62 percent that of white families. A projection of 1947–1974 trends to the year 2000 shows black families with median income about 70 percent of whites. But in fact the median income of black families has not gone up quite as rapidly as that of whites in the past 15 years. Projection of the 1974–1986 trend implies that in the year 2000, the median income of black families would be 54 percent of those of white families—the same as that in 1960.

During the decades from the 1940s through the 1970s, the hourly wage rates and annual earnings of employed black men rose more rapidly than those of white men. Between 1960 and 1980, the relative annual earnings of black men increased from 49 percent of those of white men to 64 percent.

With respect to the relative annual earnings of men aged 25–64, the trend of improvement ended in the 1980s. Between 1960 and 1980, the black/white ratio rose from 49 to 64 percent, but it then fell back to 62 percent by 1987. This reversal arose from an increasing black-white difference in hours of employment. In 1960, black men averaged annually about 8 fewer hours of work per week than white men; this difference declined to about 5 hours per week in 1980, but it then moved up to 7 hours in 1987. If these trends continue to the year 2000, the decrease in black men's employment will offset their gains in hourly wage rates, and the average annual earnings of black men will be 58 percent those of white men, the level observed in the early 1970s.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

It was not part of the mandate of this committee to make specific recommendations for public policy. It is, however, an implication of our analyses that such rapid progress as that attained by black Americans in the 1960s will not be attainable in the immediate future without both public and private programs to increase opportunities and to reduce race-connected constraints and disadvantages. On the basis of the findings and analyses of this study, we have identified four areas of national life in which there are major options for constructive social policies to improve opportunities for

disadvantaged Americans and especially to reduce impediments to black advancement:

- Provision of education, health care, and other services to enhance people's skills and productive capabilities;
- Facilitation of national economic growth and full employment;
- Reduction of discrimination and involuntary segregation; and
- Development and reform of income-maintenance and other family assistance social welfare programs to avoid long-term poverty.

Each type of policy contains many complex possibilities. Feasible alternatives necessarily must be developed through the political processes by which collective decisions are made. Here we wish only to note some salient options.

Several specific policy interventions have been effective in promoting black advancement and greater opportunities for all Americans. Most successful have been employment and training programs such as the Job Corps; early intervention and other compensatory education programs such as Head Start; governmental financial aid for postsecondary education; increased access to health care, particularly for pre- and postnatal clinical service for low-income women; and greater health insurance coverage for all poor and near-poor people. These specific policy interventions have been shown to work and to be beneficial to the nation. Improvements in program design are surely possible and should be given the highest priority by policy makers and practitioners.

The one issue that stands out above all others in this study is that of bringing the black population into gainful full employment. This is a major task for public policy. Economic opportunity alone will not solve all problems, of course, but it is the essential ground for other constructive developments. All the evidence reviewed in this report points to the central importance of jobs for men and women at pay levels that permit families to live above the poverty line.

Macroeconomic growth and reduced joblessness create favorable conditions, but they do not remove some crucial barriers that exist for blacks. Improvement depends also on active promotion and vigorous enforcement of antidiscrimination laws and administrative measures to reduce discrimination in employment, education, and housing. Carefully designed programs intended to increase black participation in social institutions can be useful in counteracting the persisting effects of past exclusion, discrimination, and segregation. Both the removal of barriers and compensatory programs are needed for full equality of opportunity. Persistent segregation in neighborhoods and schools, for example, are barriers to equal opportunity, and they cannot be ameliorated without large-scale efforts—national, state, and local.

Economic growth and removal of barriers create many opportunities. To take advantage of such opportunities, however, black Americans must further develop their education, skills, health, and other "human capital." The efforts of individuals and of voluntary associations and groups are likely to

increase in the near term. But these efforts can be fully effective only when public programs provide access to job training and education for children and youths from low-income families. The decreases in black college enrollment in the late 1970s and 1980s that followed reductions in federal financial aid to students attest to the importance of such support.

This brings us to the fourth type of social policy on our list: policies to reduce extreme and long-term poverty. Income-maintenance and family assistance programs have developed to meet residual problems not solved by general economic growth and equal opportunity measures. For example, although better education and job training programs have a potential for helping to place workers into available jobs, they will not overcome all the barriers that keep many single mothers and men out of the labor force.

Furthermore, the provision of employment is not enough, by itself, to raise all families out of poverty. Three-fourths of recipients of family assistance and other benefits are unable to find work at wages sufficient to produce incomes above the poverty level even if they worked yearlong at full-time jobs. To reduce the extreme poverty of such families—primarily mothers and children in female-headed households—thus requires supplementary programs and changes in tax policies and child support programs.[1]

Programs specifically aimed at the reduction of poverty may take two contrasting approaches: a single comprehensive program such as the negative income tax or a set of programs directed to different categories of individuals and families, such as child allowances, Social Security for the aged, special aid for the ill and disabled, and so on. The latter approach characterizes the present situation in the United States. Although this diversity is often criticized, plausible arguments can be advanced that the more differentiated approach can be made both more efficient and politically feasible.

BLACK PERSPECTIVES

The historical record of black people in America shows a persisting tension between the goals of social separation from whites and inclusion within the broader society. This tension differs from—although it has some similarities to—the tension between cultural assimilation and pluralism among groups of different national origins. Black Americans have long debated the merits of integrated participation with whites as opposed to the development of autonomous organizations and communities.

In the past, segregation and discrimination helped to create strong currents of so-called "black nationalism," illustrated in separatist politics as well as in cultural autonomy movements (Chapters 3–5). But blacks' political and economic interdependence with white Americans is very great and is growing. Our data show that black separatism is not a dominant orientation. The likelihood appears low that separatism will be important in the near future,

1. The Family Support Act of 1988 was passed by Congress late in the year, and we were not able to assess its likely effects.

with the exception of some use of separatist ideology in political debate. Yet there is much evidence that racial identities and interests are likely to remain significant in political affairs, and in public life generally, for the foreseeable future. We do not find convincing evidence that such identities and interests are diminishing in importance.

Full assimilation of blacks in a "color-blind" society is unlikely in any foreseeable future. Existing social and economic separation, very low rates of intermarriage, and group preferences and images ensure the continued existence of distinct racial groups. It does not mean a continuation of discrimination in public life, but it does mean that black Americans will claim acceptance and equality on their own terms. Although a "color-blind" society is not foreseen, integrated participation in public affairs is becoming more acceptable. Indeed, political and civic coalitions and joint collective activities are now common. As shown in Chapters 4 and 5, a high degree of cooperation and coalition between blacks and whites has been and is now important on selective issues of legislative and administrative politics. Coalitions with other racial and ethnic minorities will likely grow in importance as such minorities become an increasing proportion of the total citizenry.

We cannot exclude the possibility of confrontation and violence. The urban revolts and civil disorders of the 1960s and later are still vividly present in memory; the 1980s had barely begun when blacks in Miami exploded in anger and dissatisfaction. The ingredients are there: large populations of jobless youths, an extensive sense of relative deprivation and injustice, distrust of the legal system, frequently abrasive police-community relations, highly visible inequalities, extreme concentrations of poverty, and great racial awareness. Such conditions sometimes produce apathy when disadvantaged persons feel that their situation is hopeless. But the surface calm can disappear very quickly. A specific source of possible social turbulence is widespread dissatisfaction with the operation of the criminal justice system, which is evident among black Americans. The allegations of bias are two sided: that law enforcement officials, judicial proceedings, and the correctional system treat blacks with undue harshness, and that the system is too lenient with whites who commit criminal offenses against blacks. Given the high likelihood that young urban males, blacks and whites, will continue on occasion to find themselves in confrontational situations, and given the continuing high incidence of street crime, it is realistic to expect future episodes of racial violence, followed by concentrated pressures on legal and correctional institutions to deal with alleged racial bias.

CONCLUSION

After our intensive review, the committee has a concluding reflection on the wider implications of the findings. We believe it is consistent with the research data and the best available historical understandings of how American society functions.

Every society to survive has to adapt to its environment and maintain its resources over time. It must cope with the basic economic problem—the efficient allocation of scarce resources—as well as with its external relations to other societies. Every society must also develop practical arrangements for the internal distribution of power, economic goods, and social prestige and respect. Finally, societies over the long term must safeguard their own legitimacy and historical meaning. These latter tasks of social integration and cultural maintenance tend to be discounted and neglected in a task-oriented society that focuses attention on short-run payoffs. In the United States of the coming decades, any agenda for these basic needs will have to give high priority to dealing with the fissures that have been created by the history of relations among black and white Americans. Our review leads us to believe that now is an appropriate time for a serious national effort to grasp the means at hand to accomplish this vital assignment.

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